



Under the Hood: A close look at Pixelmill's CSS table-less templates

Ever wondered how to work
with a CSS template design?

Heather Waterman takes you through a general overview of
what you can expect to find in PixelMill's CSS templates.

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What do you mean by table-less?

You may think you know the difference between a tables-based design and a table-less design – one uses tables and one does not – but there is much more going on under the hood than just the absence of tables. A table-less template is one that relies on a stylesheet for the design and formatting instead of using nested tables, sliced images, and spacer gifs to create a page layout. More importantly, our table-less templates (also called CSS Templates) are coded to meet with today's web standards which, more than a site that *looks* nice, involves clean and compliant XHTML code.

Several reasons for losing our tables and moving to a table-less design:

- Meets web standard and accessibility guidelines (pixelmill.com/support/a10/kb101564.htm)
- Helps search engine optimization
- Stylesheets are more flexible and allow easier global design changes
- Pages load faster
- You have future opportunities for making alternative versions of your web site (for mobile devices, etc.) without having to make a whole new site

Those are just a few reasons to move from a table based design to CSS. I have to say I used to be an exclusively tables-only designer, but now having made the transition, I cannot imagine ever going back to designing with tables.

Let's take a look under the hood at one of our templates

Please note that while this is one example of a table-less CSS template, the way the code and CSS is built will vary from developer to developer. This article will give you a good general idea of how CSS templates are structured and how they work, however.



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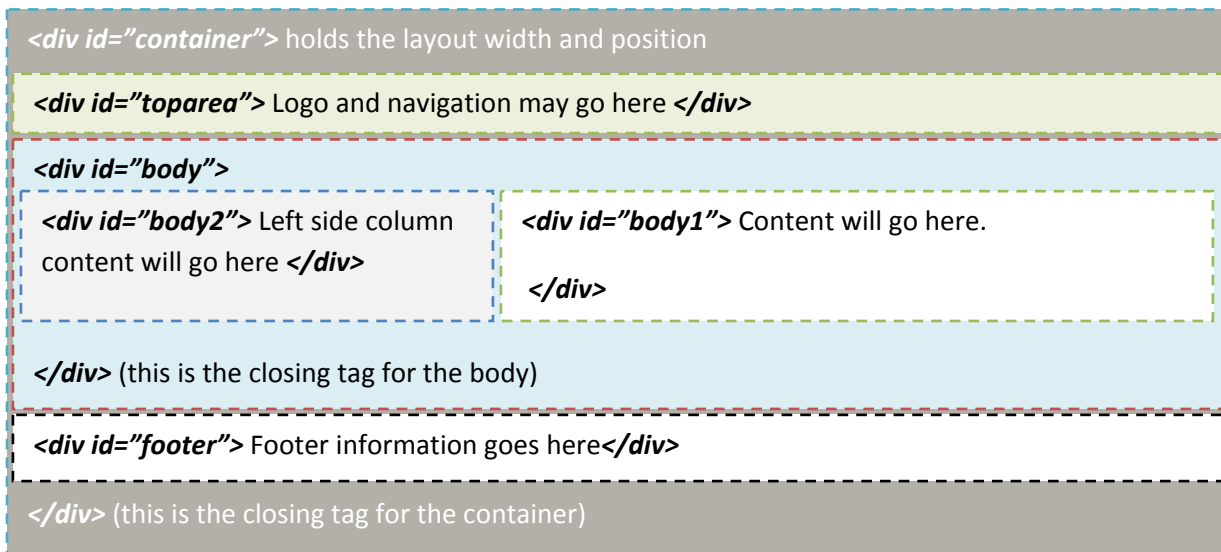
Note: According to *PixelMill Standards* XHTML Transitional is the lowest level of validation for our templates.



```
1 <!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//EN" "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd">
2 <html>
3
4 <head>
5 <meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=windows-1252" />
6 <title>Home</title>
7 <link rel="stylesheet" type="text/css" href="styles.css" />
8 </head>
9
10 <body>
11 <div id="container">
12   <!--webbot bot="Include" U-Include="includes/top.htm" TAG="BODY" --><div id="body3col">
13     <div id="body2">
14       <!--webbot bot="Include" U-Include="includes/menu.htm" TAG="BODY" --><h2>
15         Heading 2</h2>
16       <p>Use Heading 2 in the left column for a specialized header bar.</p>
```

1. Line 1: XHTML DOCTYPE
2. Line 5: The content type is specified
3. Line 7: Link style sheet is used.
4. Line 11: The entire layout is set with <div> tags in lieu tables. Each DIV tag gets a unique ID (ID's can only be used once on a page and classes can be used many times on a page).

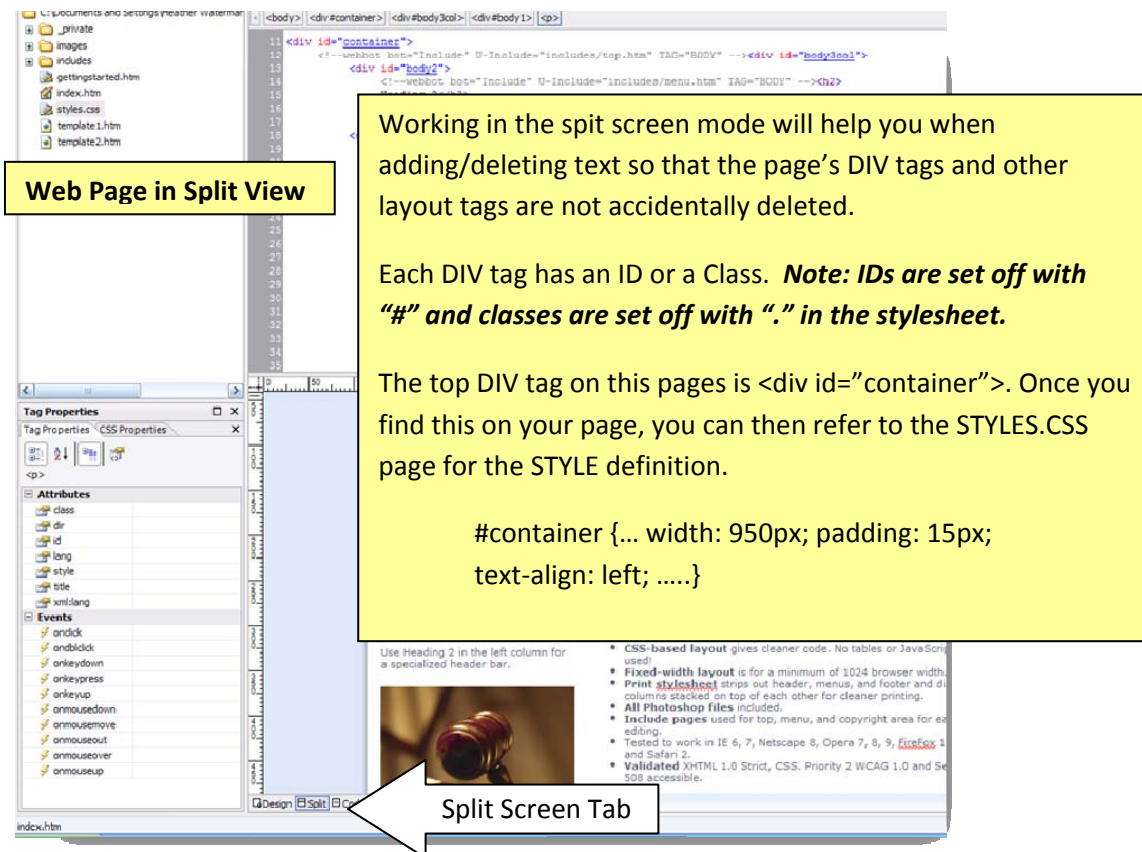
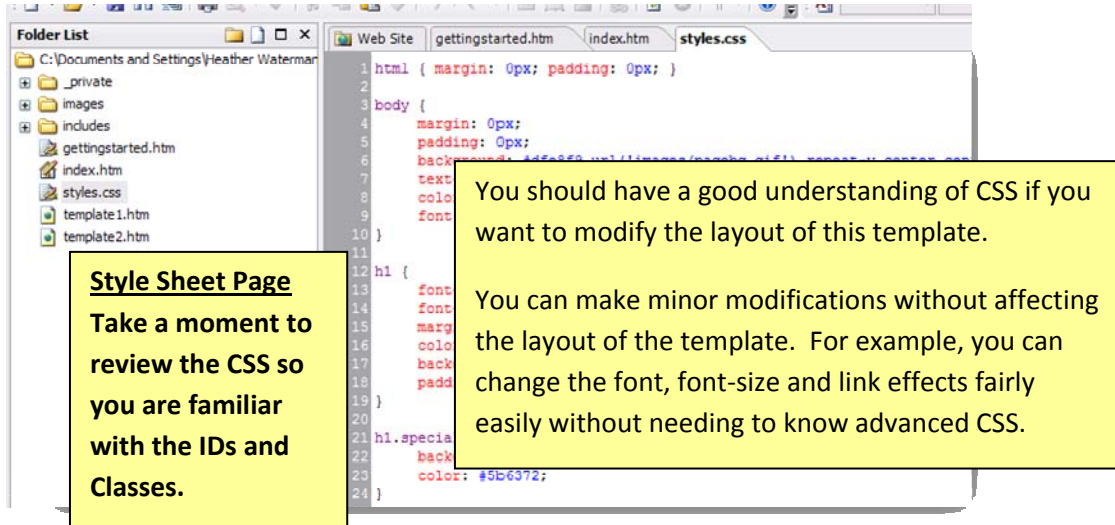
Here is just a quick diagram of how div tags in a CSS template work together with each other. **This is a general overview and does not reflect the template listed above.**



A quick note: If you are using FP2003, your WISYWIG view of the template will look distorted, the font sizes will be very large your columns may have shifted, etc, this is okay! Your template is not broken. In FP2003 you will need to use the **File > Preview in browser** to view your web changes.

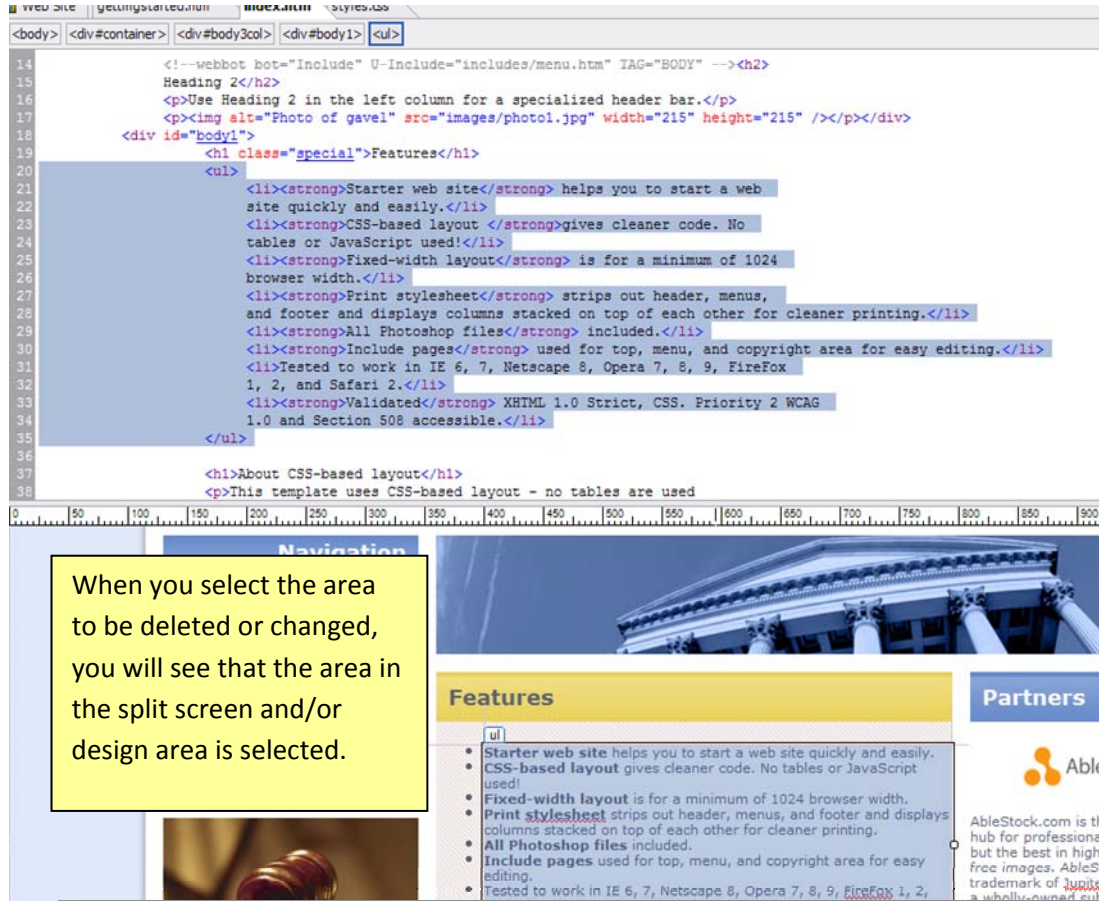
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To properly understand how to work within a CSS template you should have the style sheet open and the web page you are working on in the split view mode in FrontPage, Expression Web, or Dreamweaver. **For this article we are using Expression Web.**

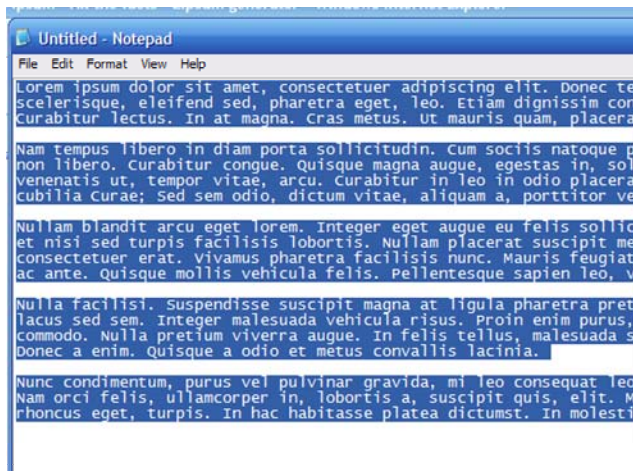


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Replacing the template text

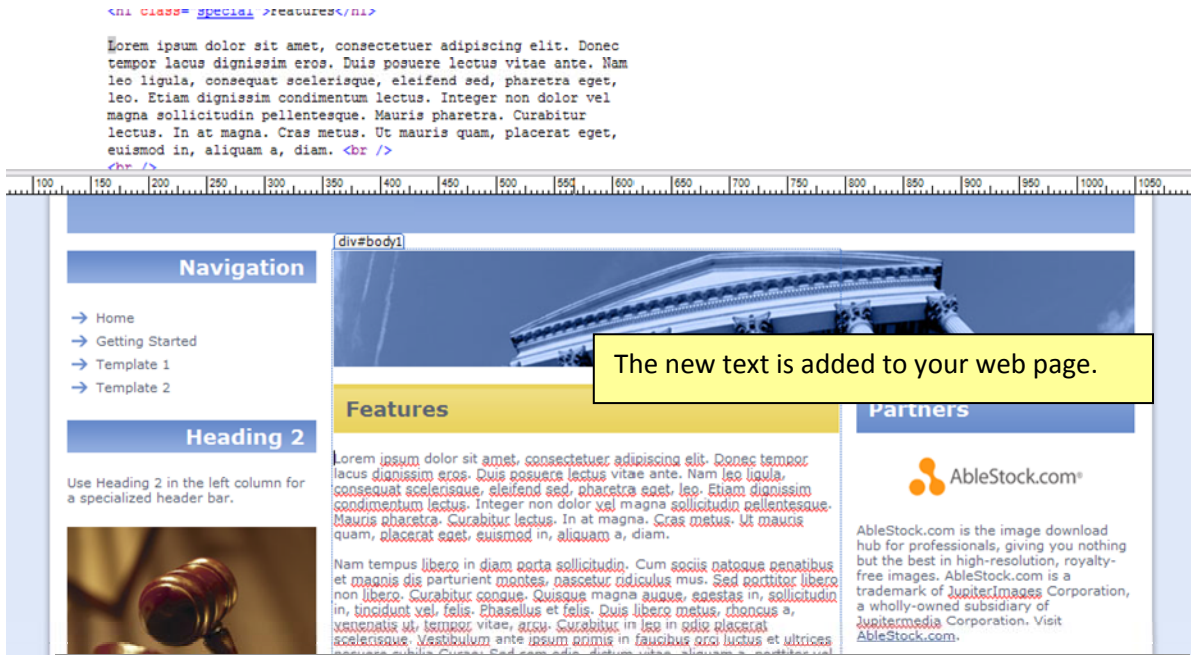


Delete the template text and add your own. **You SHOULD NOT copy text from Word or an existing site**, just select the text you want to add, copy the text into Note Pad then copy and paste the text into your page. You can then apply the formatting (bold, italics, headings) using the tools in the editor so that the proper HTML code is inserted.

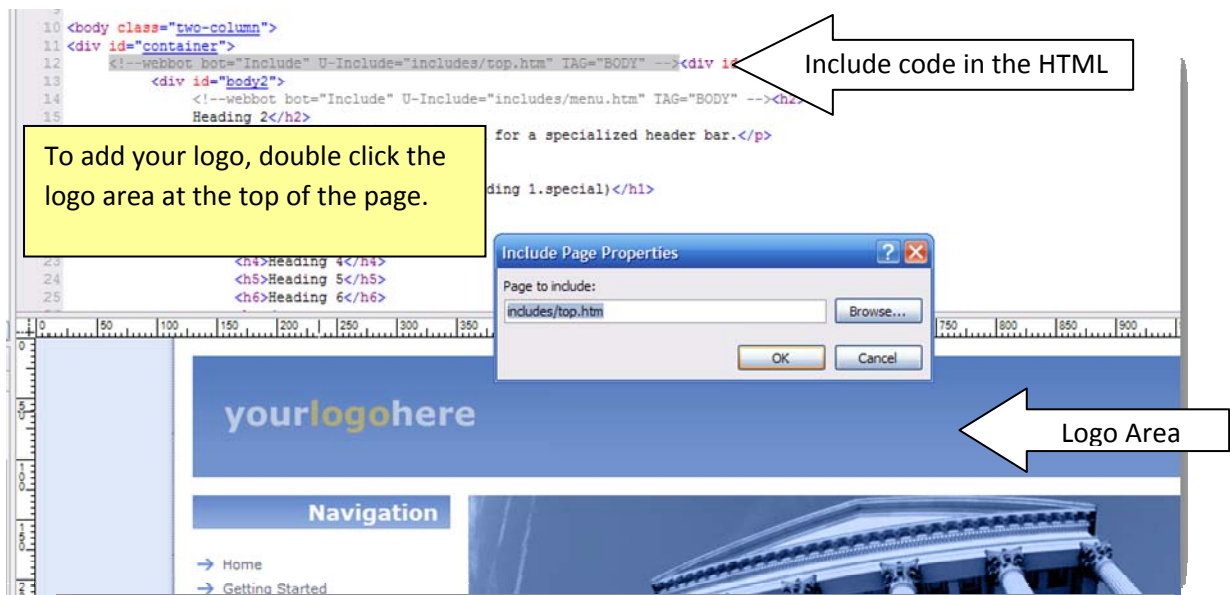


Alternatively, use Edit > Paste Special when pasting in your content. This will strip the copied content of formatting so that the text will be formatted according to the styles in the new template without bringing in extra code and formatting that bloats your code. Again, you can then apply headings, bold, italics, and other formatting using the editing tools so that the correct HTML code is added.

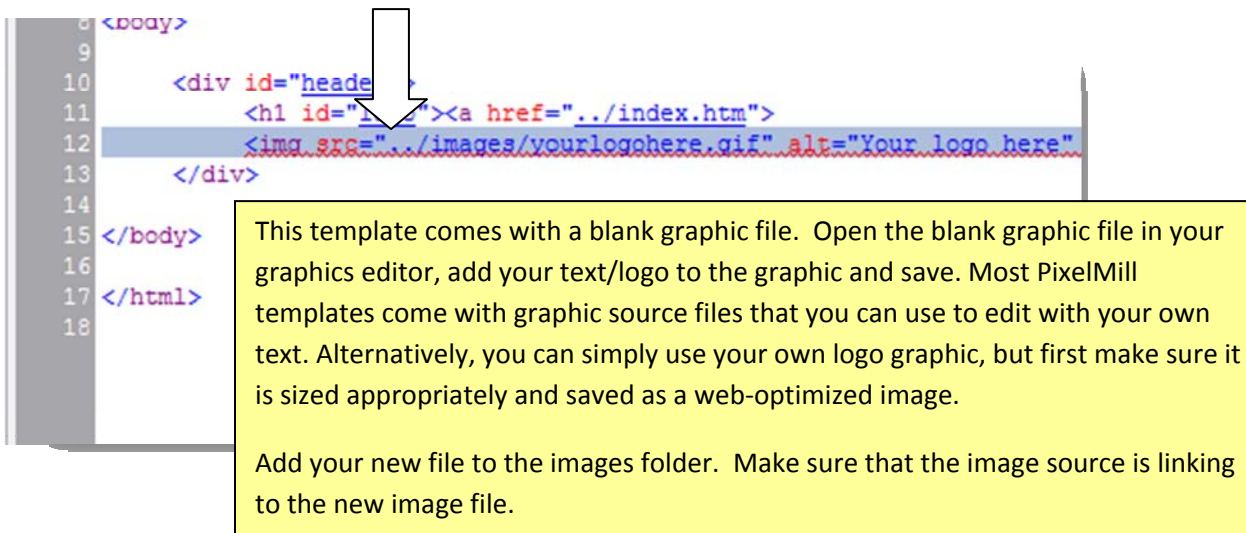
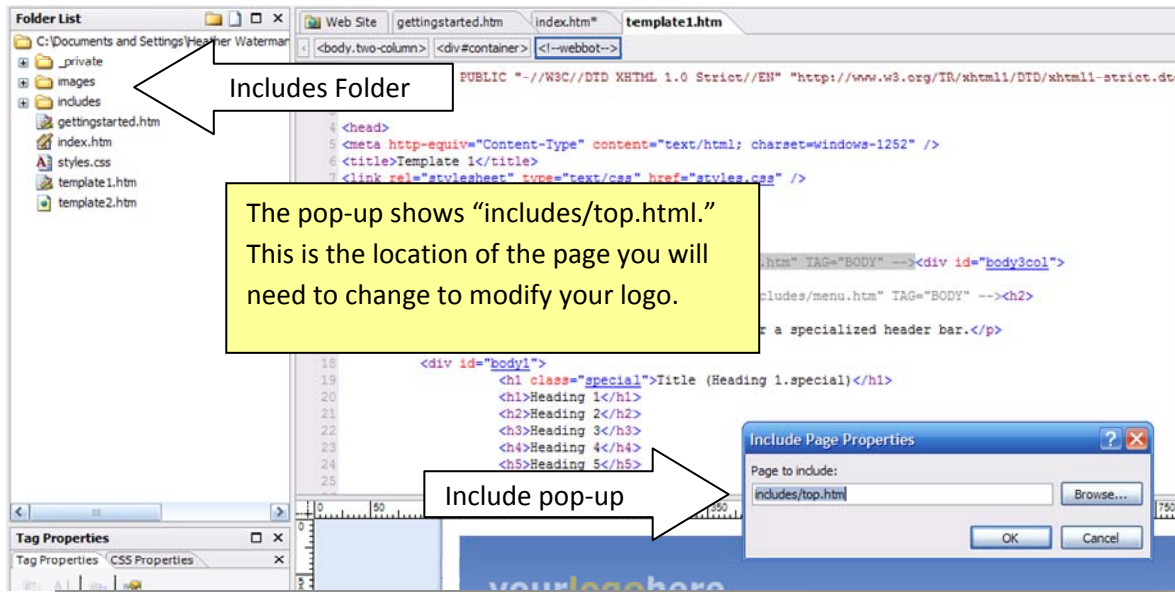
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Add your logo



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Modifying the menus/navigation

To modify the navigation links in this template, locate the includes folder and open the appropriate menu (top, sub or bottom). Expression does not use FrontPage navigation.

For more information about using Include files in lieu of FrontPage Navigation, please view Corrie's webinar on moving from FP Navigation to using Include Pages. [PixelMill Webinar](#)

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Navigation

- [Home](#)
- [Getting Started](#)
- [Template 1](#)
- [Template 2](#)

When you open your menu page you will see a basic bullet list. Just edit the link you want to change and/or add your new links.

The STYLES.CSS page will take care of the formatting so that your changed/new links have the same exact styles. Save your changes and

view your web page.

While editing your PixelMill template you should use **the File > Preview in browser** to see a sample of your template.

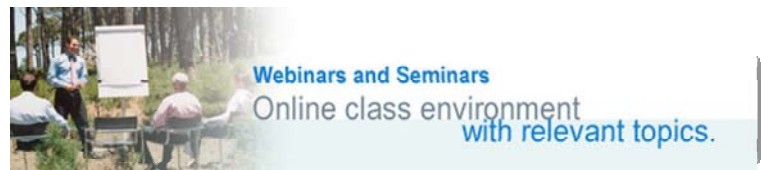
After your changes have been made and you are satisfied with the results, go ahead and publish your website.



Learn more...

While this overview should get you started working with our CSS templates, there are many new and exciting things to learn about using CSS templates.

Corrie Haffly, Lead Designer at PixelMill.com has already hosted several webinars on using and tweaking CSS templates. I highly recommend taking the time to view these webinars for a better understanding of CSS templates.



Our Free CSS Webinars:

- Tweaking CSS Templates
- Managing CSS in Expression Web
- Replacing FP Link Bars in Expression Web.

The Free webinars can be viewed at <http://pixelmill.com/products/education/seminars-webinars.aspx>.

Our Premium Webinars:

- Tweaking CSS Templates Part 2
- Using CSS to Format Navigation Links

The Premium Webinars can be purchased at <http://pixelmill.com/products/education/seminars-webinars.aspx>.